



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

# FORCES

Friends of Recreation, Conservation, and Environmental Stewardship

Fall 2021 Newsletter

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SUNY ESF lab-reared snails.  
Photo: OPRHP

The FORCES mission is to engage New York State college students to simultaneously improve OPRHP resources and enrich student academic, recreational, and career opportunities.

## Back to School or Summer Vacation?

Tom Hughes, NRS Biologist

Central Region FORCES Program Manager

As our collegiate FORCES Stewards and high school Jr. Conservation Stewards took to the field this season, we anticipated a summer that would bring us equal parts learning and fun, and that is exactly what we got! After so many days of canceled classes, virtual meetings and cyber lunches, our FORCES Stewards were hungry for new and exciting experiences in our parks and the opportunity to work (and play) together once again. Our 6th Annual Trainapalooza at Watkins Glen State Park kicked off the season (page 3). After that, Stewards from multiple regions gathered for field trips to several more parks, including Chimney Bluffs (page 6), Chittenango Falls (page 9) and Green Lakes & Robert H. Treman (page 12). FORCES Stewards were able to connect across regions and celebrate their accomplishments together in the field.



Lunchtime at Chittenango Falls State Park (above). FORCES Stewards collect and study benthic macroinvertebrates to determine stream health at Robert H Treman State Park (left). Photos: OPRHP



We certainly had a lot of projects and people to celebrate! Please check out our regional updates in this issue — Niagara, Taconic, Finger Lakes, Central and Allegany. I am so thrilled and grateful for how our FORCES participants have endured these pandemic times and for their resiliency. It's this resiliency we love to see, and I believe our FORCES Stewards are effectively doing their part, in and out of the classroom, to establish similar resiliency for our parks and natural resources.

## Niagara Region Update

Alexandra Tillman, FORCES Program Specialist

With 11(!) FORCES Stewards working throughout the Niagara Region this summer, we had plenty of helping hands for the many ongoing stewardship projects in our parks. We hosted two Trail Management Stewards, four Conservation Stewards (Group A & Group B), two Water Quality Stewards, two Pollinator Stewards, and an Environmental Education Steward. The rush of projects that occurs during the summer field work season is always pressing, however, this group thrived in the bustle even with the extreme heat we had!

Our Trail Management Stewards, Michael Bruch and Julia Flowers, tirelessly worked to maintain as many trails throughout the region as possible. In total, they were able to check eight parks off their list! During the season, Michael and Julia learned proper trail management strategies, the safe-use of hand tools and brush cutters, and how to evaluate trail structures/surfaces for updates needed. They also used GIS technology to accurately map the trail system at Beaver Island SP.

Emily Pinto served as our Environmental Education Steward working out of Evangola State Park and assisting our interpretive staff with all aspects of their work. Emily's hours were spent on programming, researching topics for interpretive signage, pollinator garden creation, and much more! She also staffed the Evangola Nature Center where she was able to interact and educate with park patrons on all sorts of environmentally focused topics!



Julia and Michael performing trail maintenance at Beaver Island State Park. Photo: OPRHP

Our two Water Quality Stewards, Jillian Smith and Kaitlynn Webber, were responsible for the daily testing at multiple site locations at Woodlawn Beach State Park. Each day, the Stewards took samples from Lake Erie and Rush Creek, completed field sheets regarding turbidity, environmental factors, recent weather events etc., submitted the data into our online system, AND delivered the samples to the testing lab all by 9:00am! The work they did was essential to keeping our beaches open for patron use and maintaining public health safety and standards as well.



Kate and Celine having some fun at the Beaver Island SP Nature Center. Photo: OPRHP

Pollinator Stewards, Celine Kawalek and Kate Turri, spent their days this summer working in our parks that have pollinator gardens and no-mow zones. They used iNaturalist to observe active species and to help ID some new ones. A large portion of their time focused on pollinator garden rehab and planning. Celine and Kate created garden designs for staff to implement in Artpark State Park and Beaver Island State Park and assisted with regular maintenance at these locations as well. On their last day as FORCES Stewards, they toured the Western District Nursery at Knox Farm State Park where all the plants used in the region's pollinator gardens are sourced from.

Brendan DeCoff, Noah Kaczmarek, Emily O'Brien, and Maddie Was staffed our Conservation Steward Crew. They worked on numerous projects throughout the region, however, some to highlight are invasive crayfish surveys at Amherst State Park, AVID (Assessing Vegetation Impacted by Deer) surveys at Knox Farm State Park, emerald ash borer biocontrol releases throughout the region, and more! A significant amount of their time was invested in invasive species surveys at Golden Hill and Four Mile Creek State Parks, the Gorge Gap path system, and on removals of woody invasives at Fort Niagara and Joseph Davis State Parks.

In total, the summer FORCES group in Niagara donated 1,403 volunteer hours to our region's stewardship efforts! Every bit of their hard work has been greatly appreciated and applauded by park staff, management, and patrons alike.



## Coordinator's Corner

Amy Kochem, FORCES Program Coordinator

The 2021 summer FORCES crew consisted of 45 FORCES Stewards and six Jr. Conservation Stewards across seven NYS Park Regions. Our dedicated team worked diligently on projects including wildlife surveying and monitoring, invasives management, environmental education, habitat restoration, trail stewardship, and water quality monitoring. We are grateful for the enthusiasm, time, and energy put into these noteworthy projects.

Our 6th Annual Trainapalooza was held at the end of June at Watkins Glen State Park. Over 35 Stewards, SCA and Park Staff from four NYS Park Regions joined together for a two-day training. The days were filled with birding, plant ID, map and compass skills, aquatic ecology, and more. In the evening we enjoyed a group dinner followed by a campfire.

Keep an eye out on the FORCES website for the *Who's Who* publication that will highlight all of our 2021 FORCES Stewards.

Searching for a spring internship? Be sure to contact your regional FORCES staff to inquire about spring opportunities.



Trainapalooza participants at Watkins Glen State Park. Photo: OPRHP

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# Taconic Region Update

Joshua DiPaola, Natural Resource Specialist

Preservation is a term which tends to imply maintaining the integrity of something tangible such that it remains free of, or buffered against, elements of damage, disturbance or decay. There are situations in environmental stewardship, however, where selective disturbance must be intentionally implemented to rectify prior disturbance, with the overall pursuit nonetheless being long-term preservation. At times, these initiatives are better described within the overlap of conservation and preservation.

FORCES Stewards Will Starkey and Felix Gonzalez took to land, water, and air whilst supporting preservation initiatives at Rockefeller State Park Preserve (RSPP). On the terrestrial plane, early summer marked a period in which the RSPP stewards focused their efforts on hand-pulling nearly 70 garbage bags of black swallow-wort, a highly-invasive vine detrimental to sensitive wildlife areas. This quantity of hand-removal inevitably resulted in environmental disturbance, but our long-term goal will be to replant native flora where this invasive flora was removed. A special thanks is extended to our new Flora Steward, Devyani Mishra, who has been instrumental in leading flora initiatives with our FORCES Stewards. These initiatives included the identification and removal of new invasive flora within the preserve, as well as monitoring floral diseases, such as beech leaf disease within the preserve.



One weeks-worth of black swallow-wort. Photo: OPRHP



FORCES Steward Will Starkey assisting with the partial removal of an artificial dam obstructing the flow of water and passage of wildlife within the Pocantico River. Photo: OPRHP

In terms of aquatic initiatives, RSPP Stewards worked together to remove an artificial dam obstructing the Pocantico River within the preserve. This dam was put in place by anglers and patrons years ago who sought to use this area for fishing and swimming. The preservation concern, however, was that this dam was not only unnatural, but also likely disturbed the passage of aquatic wildlife up and downstream from this obstruction. The stewardship team worked meticulously to survey this area for wildlife throughout the summer prior to its stepwise removal. While the partial removal of this dam certainly caused short-term disturbance to the local ecosystem, we feel that its gradual removal will restore and preserve the long-term function of the proximate ecosystems in place prior to its introduction.

On the wing, Stewards continued their installation and monitoring of nest boxes for sensitive avian wildlife. Ten new nest boxes were installed at Rockwood Hall within RSPP, which resulted in nearly twice the amount of clutches and broods of native cavity nesting birds compared to last year. Of particular note was a marked increase in purple martin and tree swallow fledglings.

Throughout the remaining duration of 2021, we plan to work cohesively as a team to find new ways to implement short-term conservation initiatives with long-term preservation in mind. It is our hope to welcome in new FORCES Stewards to share in the planning and execution of such initiatives.



Newly installed nest boxes for purple martins with a clutch (left) and resulting brood of martin nestlings (right). Photo: OPRHP



## Staff Highlight: Alexandra Brown

Stewardship Specialist, Central Region



My Journey with NYS Parks has recently been rekindled! In July, I was hired on as the Stewardship Specialist in the Central Region focusing on wildlife management in State Parks. My immediate introduction to this position was stepping foot into several of our parks within the first couple of weeks. I got to meet our staff/stewards/interns and learned first-hand about all the different projects they are involved in. My first impression was how outstanding the sense of community is within the Environmental Field Team and was excited to have the opportunity to be part of it!

My concentration in wildlife started in 2009 at Paul Smith's College where I majored in Fisheries and Wildlife Management. During my time at Paul Smith's, I volunteered at the Adirondack Wildlife Refuge assisting with the daily feeding and monitoring of various animals at the facility. I also took opportunities when presented to volunteer with the NYS DEC, helping with American Woodcock Surveys, turkey banding and winter browse surveys for deer.

In 2013 I graduated from Paul Smith's with my Bachelor of Science. Out of school, I was offered an internship with NYS Parks out of Albany. I was working under Mark Rogers as the Wildlife Unit Assistant, assisting in the development of wildlife fact sheets for State Parks and accompanying staff on site visits to evaluate wildlife projects. My internship ended that summer, and like many, I had to figure out what my next move was going to be. Between 2013 and 2015 I took on many titles, Veterinary Assistant, Trail Crew, Naturalist Intern and even a Zip Line Guide!

In the Fall of 2015, I accepted a position with the NYS DEC in Region 7 as a Fish & Wildlife Tech. Initially I was hired on with a focus in land management and the operation of the Cayuga-Tompkins Cooperative Hunting Area, but later transitioned into big game management. I was responsible for performing damage checks for deer and bear, issuing big game permits, the collection of deer management data and conducting wildlife health surveillance for submission. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work on SO many different projects during the 6 years that I was with the DEC. It was a tough decision to move on from my position, but I was ready for a new experience!

As the Stewardship Specialist, I feel inspired and motivated! My position is responsible for the organization and implementation of regional wildlife management, as well as, providing stewardship for our NYS Parks environmental resources and park facilities within the Central Region. Since coming on with Parks, I have adopted the Deer Management Plan at Green Lakes State Park. I have also been able to coordinate with Park Managers on how to mitigate current wildlife issues. My plan is to set a foundation of best management practices for common and reoccurring wildlife issues in State Parks. I am excited to apply my past experiences to my future projects, make connections and create opportunities for others to get involved with wildlife management!

*"My FORCES internship experience will benefit my future academic opportunities by steering me towards classes which will help me to find a job in the field. It will also help me with professional opportunities by providing me connections within the NY State Parks Agency."*

Elaina Porter, Clarkson University

# Finger Lakes Region Update

Carlin Wakefield, FORCES Program Specialist

It was the biggest year yet for Finger Lakes Region FORCES with a whopping 13 region-wide Stewards working on a diverse array of important projects! In the Ithaca area, Conservation Stewards Megan Holman, Bridget Hagen, Nora Gagnon, and Meagan Terry worked on monitoring our eastern red-backed salamander cover board plots and Assessing the Vegetative Impact of Deer (AVID) in collaboration with Cornell University at Taughannock Falls and Buttermilk Falls State Parks. They also assisted research partner Dr. Andrea Dávalos with gathering pale swallow-wort demography data for her biocontrol project plots at Long Point State Park. Stewards visited Central Region parks and assisted with multiple projects including the American hart's-tongue fern, piping plover, and Chittenango Falls invasive species management. Finger Lakes had the pleasure of hosting the Central, Niagara, and Thousand Islands Region's Stewards for a biomonitoring event at Robert H. Treman State Park where Stewards learned about benthic macroinvertebrate sampling and took a hike guided by SCA Educators Shelby Crawford and Clare Foley.



Finger Lakes, Central, Niagara, and Thousand Islands Region Stewards kick sampling for benthic macroinvertebrates in Fishkill Creek at Robert H. Treman State Park. Photo: OPRHP



Finger Lakes Stewards and seasonal staff at Chimney Bluffs State Park during an invasive species systematic survey. Photo: OPRHP

In addition to conservation work, Megan Holman and Bridget Hagen were Invasive Species Management Stewards wherein they dedicated hours working with the Three Gorges Project and other FL Environmental Field Team staff on systematic mapping and removal of invasive species at the Three Gorges Parks and Chimney Bluffs State Park. Stewards also participated in a water chestnut pull at Fair Haven Beach State Park lead by Finger Lakes Invasive Species Technician, Charlie Ippolito, invasive earthworm surveys with Dr. Dávalos at Buttermilk Falls and Taughannock Falls State Parks, and water quality monitoring in the Three Gorges Parks.

Nora Gagnon also held the title of Pollinator Steward this summer, working with Landscape Restoration Program staff, Max McCune and Adriana DelGrosso, on native species planting and maintenance as well as pollinator and flowering plant surveys at the Taughannock Falls Overlook Pollinator Garden. This included a Pollinator Bioblitz with NYS Excelsior Conservation Corps members where we found a beautifully diverse array of pollinators and collected our data with iNaturalist. Meagan Terry also served as an Education Steward where she had the opportunity to work with school groups assisting SCA Educators at Taughannock Falls State Park and Newtown Battlefield.

In the Rochester area, Environmental Field Team Stewards, Samantha Callus, Allison Winden, and Jill Marianacci worked on vegetation surveys and mapping including systematic invasive species surveys at Chimney Bluffs State Park led by Charlie Ippolito. They also assisted in the 2021 summer prescribed burn at Ganondagan State Historic Site by closing trails and educating the public. Because this prescribed burn happened in the summertime, it will promote and stimulate wildflower reproduction—this fall will be a great time to take a walk through the Grassland Trail at Ganondagan and appreciate the beauty and hard work of all who were involved in this awesome project.



Nora Gagnon, Excelsior Conservation Corps members, and Three Gorges Project members during the Pollinator Bioblitz Photo: OPRHP



## Finger Lakes Region Update cont'd

Carlin Wakefield, FORCES Program Specialist

In addition to field work, Samantha Callus worked closely with Regional Biologist, Whitney Carleton, on social media outreach and content creation, permit and grant application assistance, and other administrative tasks. Marisa Kurmis and Grace Sinsebox were Plant Materials Program Stewards based out of the Plant Materials Center at Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion State Historic Site. They were led by Lead Greenhouse Technician, Elizabeth Padgett, and focused on transplant and care of thousands of native species of forbs, grasses, and woody seedlings being grown for restoration, as well as outreach and education about the great work happening at the Plant Materials Center. Jared Skrotzi and Nicole D'Aurizio worked under Trails Coordinator, Zac Ballard, focused exclusively at Chimney Bluffs State Park working on trail maintenance, erosion control, and environmental outreach to patrons in order to help protect the delicate and ecologically significant bluff system. This year we had the privilege to work with Jr. Stewards through the Pittsford School District High School internship program. Jr. Graphic Design Steward, Ellie VanHouten, continued to work with Regional Educator, Josh Teeter, on a visual representation of the Thanksgiving Address to be used for education training throughout the state. Stay tuned to future newsletters to hear where Ellie's beautiful art will be showcased. Jr. Conservation Steward Danielle Spyra worked with SCA Educator Shelby Crawford, on conservation projects at Ganondagan State Historic Site and at the Plant Materials Center greenhouses, as well as assisted Charlie Ippolito with systematic invasive species surveys at Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area.



SCA members and FORCES Conservation and Invasive Sp. Management Stewards. Photo: OPRHP

## Featured Project: European Dewberry

Lexie Davis, SUNY Brockport Graduate Student



European dewberry at Ganondagan SHS  
Photo: Lexie Davis, SUNY Brockport

In its natural environment, European dewberry (*Rubus caesius*) is a loved species. It provides foragers in Europe and Asia such as birds, beetles, animals, and even humans with a great snack. To the untrained eye, European dewberry is easily misidentified for other *Rubus* species, but its big blue clusters of berries, long petiole, and small hooked prickles distinguish it from the rest. It thrives in riparian zones, which are areas with well-drained and moist soils near rivers and streams. For this reason, it was brought to the United States in 1897 to be used as an erosion control tactic. European dewberry has since grown in conjunction with native vegetation for hundreds of years, but recently it has been considered a threat to natural communities due to its invasive tendencies. Local scientists and hikers have observed it to displace native vegetation, reduce streambank stabilization, change the soil chemistry, and rapidly spread downstream throughout the watershed. It can now be found in Victor, Brockport, Webster, Honeyoye, and Syracuse, NY. Therefore, we wondered if European dewberry is indeed a threat to native ecosystems, and further, how could we eradicate and control it.

We conducted our control experiment at Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor, New York. At this site, we applied the treatments of cutting (mechanical) using a brush-hog, a combination of cutting and herbicide using Garlon, only using herbicide (Garlon), a combination of cutting and herbicide using Triclopyr, and cutting twice. We compared the initial percent cover to the final percent cover of European dewberry. After one year of treatments, the combination treatments and herbicide only treatment were successful in reducing the percent cover of European dewberry. However, the cutting treatments increased the percent cover of European dewberry. We think this may be due to vegetative dispersal of the fragments after cutting. However, after a second year of treatments, we may be able to see a better reduction in percent cover of dewberry in the mechanical treatment sites.

## Central Region Update

Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Field Technician; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; James Boyd, BCA Project Coordinator

After many hours of staring through a spotting scope for behavioral observations and general monitoring, we confirmed seven unique adult birds with four nesting at Sandy Island Beach (SIB) State Park in addition to three migrants stopping over for a bit. Our veteran pair, Aragorn and Arwen, migrated safely back to the southern states for the approaching wintering months but sadly our parents did not have a successful chick-rearing experience. All three chicks (Sandy, Montario, and El Dorado) did not survive but hopefully our re-occurring pair can try again and make a better season in 2022. To bring some hope, a chick from the 2020 season year returned home briefly and gave her dad a little trouble. Stevie Nicks was spotted by Meredith Grimshaw (DEC Dune Steward), Mack Conan (Regional Field Technician) and Kennedy Sullivan (Piping Plover Field Tech). Stevie stayed until July 4<sup>th</sup>. Our brand new pair, Ajax and Arlene, found their way to Sandy Island to nest. They experienced a greater outcome, with two of their four chicks reaching their fledge date and migrating! We give a loved good luck to their chicks, Mr. Clean and Dr. Bronners, who may have stayed longer than we expected, but we are excited to hopefully hear reports of them on their winter grounds. Our team cannot wait to see what next year brings us with our beloved piping plovers.



Mack Conan, Regional Field Technician, observing plovers through a spotting scope. Photo: OPRHP



Steward Elaina Porter and Piping Plover Field Tech. Kennedy Sullivan educating park patrons at Sandy Island Beach State Park. Photo: OPRHP

With our interactive roving program, we developed and implemented a new theme for each weekend corresponding to the current stage of the plover's natural history. This kept our patrons engaged and our conversations fresh to expand patron knowledge about the plovers and their unique habitat. We reached 1,098 people this season with a visitation of up to 18,570 patrons! The visitation was lower than last year, but we appreciate our community supporting our state park and those that also support our conservation efforts. Our conservation efforts were shared by partners in two news articles. We attest that compliance proved more positive this summer season and we cannot wait to see our visitors again next year!

When the season started to dwindle, a snowy plover, previously never reported in NYS, was observed by SCA Piping Plover Steward, Sarah Forestiere, with Matthew Brown, volunteer and top birder in Oswego County, confirming the species. Birders from all over New York State, and even out of state, came to see this extremely rare shorebird!

Our team also contributed to many other projects. Piping Plover Project Coordinator Claire Nellis, Piping Plover SCA Steward Sarah Forestiere, and Piping Plover Field Technician Kennedy Sullivan, volunteered at several MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) Banding sessions with Onondaga Audubon located at Baltimore Woods Nature Center. The team additionally helped James Boyd, Green Lakes Bird Conservation Area Project Coordinator, at Green Lakes State Park to conduct grassland bird surveys and a nighttime owl survey. At the Great New York State Fair, we assisted fairgoers with building bluebird nesting boxes. We want to thank all our FORCES Stewards helping our team throughout the summer and the large group that aided us in taking down our snow fencing for the winter. We appreciate you all for your contributions to the plover project as it wouldn't have been such a success without you!



Kennedy, Claire, and Sarah at SIB. Photo: OPRHP

In our fall season, our team will continue to help additional projects across the wide range of state parks, focusing on invasive species removal at Selkirk Shores State Park, dune grass transplants at Sandy Island, education and outreach and various other projects around the region to help the partners that aided us during our busy summer! With the end of the season, we also want to give a good luck to Claire Nellis, as she will be going onto maternity leave the end of September. We hope she has a safe and easy process bringing Wesley into the world! We hope our plovers have a great winter vacation down in the south of the US.



## Central Region Update cont'd

Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Field Technician; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; James Boyd, BCA Project Coordinator

This summer, the American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) crew completed an enormous amount of work to advance the conservation of this threatened fern species. Hundreds of hours of invasive species management work were logged at Clark Reservation and Chittenango Falls, among other partner sites. Notably, we teamed up with the Central New York Land Trust (CNYLT) at their Three Falls Woods property to manage invasive plants and then transplant 200 greenhouse-grown AHTF at the site! We also assisted our friends at CNYLT with a trash removal event at Three Falls and hauled out old washing machines, dozens of tires, busted canoes, and even a motorcycle frame! We continued to care for about 1,500 AHTF being grown at the Plant Materials Program at Sonnenberg Gardens and installed four raised beds to help better prepare the ferns for future transplanting. We created a short video about the geology and ecology of Clark Reservation for a virtual school program later this year. With the assistance of the Finger Lakes FORCES crew, we censused the largest AHTF population in the state at Clark Reservation! Several surveys for Tree of Heaven and spotted lanternfly were completed and we were thankful to not detect any lanternfly at Clark Reservation or Chittenango Falls. Lastly, we started to wrap up work on jumping worm experiments and field sampling with our partners at SUNY Cortland and Cornell University.



Steph Minarik, Elizabeth Padgett, and Liz Rolon (left to right) transplant AHTF at the Three Falls Woods CNYLT property. Photo: OPRHP



Finger Lakes and Central Region FORCES and seasonal staff at Chittenango Falls State Park. Photo: OPRHP

Through the summer season, the Chittenango Ovate Amber Snail (COAS) project continued their efforts with invasive management. This included removal of pale swallow-wort and woody invasive species stems along the Gorge and Creekside Trails, and along the roadside of Chittenango Falls State Park. In addition, we also clipped and removed European dewberry. In sections where dewberry was removed, there is evidence of native species growing back including goldenrods, sedges, and aster species. The Finger Lakes Region's Stewards and Environmental Field Team visited Chittenango Falls to help with buckthorn removals and did a forest health survey. During their visit, we removed over 200 stems of European buckthorn!

The 2021 summer season was full of education and outreach events. Throughout the summer, FORCES Stewards held 17 tabling events where 1,077 park patrons were educated about COAS and its unique habitat. Chenango and Madison County 4-H youth groups also visited in June and July. During the field trips, we engaged them with geocaching and talking about the endemic snails. In July, The Syracuse Refugee & Immigrant Self-Empowerment (RISE) group visited Chittenango Falls State Park where a group of high schoolers participated in a bio blitz and discussions on the snail.

Three snail surveys were conducted during the summer. However, due to safety concerns from rockfalls, they were ultimately canceled. Luckily, it was deemed safe enough to release 20 mature, SUNY ESF lab-reared COAS individuals, and one egg mass into the habitat zone on two dates in August and September.



The Syracuse RISE group with Foster Valle. Photo: OPRHP

## Central Region Update cont'd

Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Field Technician; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; James Boyd, BCA Project Coordinator



Helen, Kanika, Aidan, and Peter during a survey of Chenango Valley SP's bog trail wetland. Photo: OPRHP

The 2021 Summer season was a huge success for the Green Lakes Bird Conservation Area (BCA) crew. In total, the crew consisted of nine members: James Boyd, Peter Sterbak, Kanika Jakhmola, Billy Sullivan, Helen Sanders, Aidan McCarthy, Caroline Opalenick, Ben Oppedisano, and Clara Tyrel. Invasive species removals at Green Lakes State Park was the team's primary function. For pale swallow-wort alone, 4,609 root balls were dug out, 14,458 seed pods were clipped, and 5.73 acres were mowed. Garlic mustard, honeysuckle, common buckthorn, asiatic bittersweet, and multiflora rose were also removed during transects through the old growth and grassland of Green Lakes. The team also conducted surveys and removals and wrote invasive species control plans for nine other Central Region parks with the most attention to Chenango Valley and Robert V. Riddell State Parks.

Outside of invasive species management, the crew monitored 23 bluebird boxes stationed in the grassland once a week and conducted grassland bird surveys each month. They also worked with



Eastern bluebird eggs in a nest box. Photo: OPRHP

the Environmental Education Team to assist with school tours of Green and Round Lakes. The crew hosted part of the Finger Lakes Environmental Field Team who, after going on a tour of the park, aided in the BCA's first owl survey. The crew also continued assisting SUNY Cortland professor and researcher, Dr. Andrea Dávalos, with her team's pale swallow-wort biocontrol experiment.

## Allegheny Region Update

Tom LeBlanc, Park Naturalist, Allegheny Region



Haley Pond learning to take a warbler out of a mist net. Photo: OPRHP

The Allegheny Education Department felt like it was starting to get back to normal with the return of our FORCES Stewards. This summer, Haley Pond, FORCES Education Steward in Allegheny State Park, was busy with multiple projects. Her primary focus was environmental education with school groups and summer programming. In addition to environmental education, Haley requested to have a focus on birds. Haley is from Canisius College majoring in Animal Behavior and Ecology Conservations. She started her internship with a trip to Waterman's Swamp or also known as Allenberg Bog to learn about many of the unique plants that grow there. It's home to several rare plant species and a unique bog community. The following weeks she helped staff at Allegheny State Park with 12 different school groups learn about owl pellets, creek critters, butterflies, black bear, ferns, fossils, food web and birds. Over the summer, Haley continued to do an assortment of programs for the public and developed her own program done in our Natural History Museum called "The History of Animals in ASP", which included an emphasis on the beaver, our NYS mammal, the wild turkey comeback, and the American chestnut.

Tuesday was Haley's favorite day because it was bird banding day. She used the summer to learn about becoming a bird bander and acquired the needed skills of removing birds from a mist net, data collection, and how to place a metal band on their leg. Haley saw many species for the first time up close before releasing them back to the wild, while also sharing this new experience with campers that arrived for the program.

In addition to Haley's education opportunities, she also assisted with developing content for our virtual 100-year centennial video, trail maintenance, and the removal of invasive species in the park. After completing her internship in August, Haley returned in September to volunteer with National Public Lands Day which promotes volunteer conservation of our public lands.



## Steward Spotlight: Alexandra Chimiak

Invasive Species Management Steward, Niagara Region



I came to FORCES in the spring of 2020 during my senior year at the University at Buffalo. Completing an internship was a graduation requirement for me and I just so happened to pick NYS OPRHP off of a list that was given to us by our advisor. I wasn't too sure what to expect, but FORCES quickly became my happy place.

I was very excited to complete an internship because I wanted to gain experience in my future career field. I was eager to get a sense of day-to-day work in the environmental field and gain insight from present NY State Park employees. I wasn't set on a specific career path yet, but experience and networking during FORCES helped me to narrow my options and brought me closer to a decision.

I've always cared about the environment and enjoyed the outdoors, which is what inspired me to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies. During my time at UB, I was a member of a co-ed professional environmental service fraternity and the "UB Bees" beekeeping club.

Both organizations taught me the importance of environmental stewardship and helped me contribute to environmental protection. I also enjoyed teaching my peers about the importance of sustainability by leading events on campus.

I graduated from UB in May of 2020 and I hope to eventually complete further schooling to earn a master's degree. I've always hoped to find myself in a career that allowed me to spend time outdoors while simultaneously protecting the environment; one of my favorite parts of FORCES was being able to explore different state parks that I've never been to, while also feeling a sense of accomplishment protecting native ecosystems from invasive species.

During my time as an Invasive Species Management Steward, my group surveyed for various invasive species around parks in the Niagara Region. We scraped gypsy moth egg masses to protect foliage at Fort Niagara State Park, cut buckthorn that was crowding native species at Beaver Island State Park, surveyed for the presence of hemlock woolly adelgid in Knox Farms State Park, created distribution maps using ArcGIS, and monitored the overall invasive species presence in our region. Not only did I strengthen my field ID skills, but I also learned about the best management practices based on species and the ecosystems they threaten.

In addition to field work, FORCES taught me professional development skills related to civil service exams, future schooling, and resume building. I am very grateful that this was an aspect of the FORCES program, as these are skills that I will always need for the future. I believe that FORCES set me up for success both in the environmental field and in my personal career goals by providing a strong foundation for me and other Stewards to build on.

I was honestly very sad when my internship was starting to come to an end, but fortunately, I was offered a temporary position organizing the archives room at DeVeaux Woods State Park. Upon completing that task, I was offered another position as an environmental analyst assistant, which I am very thankful for. I'm very happy to say that I was able to secure a job in my field right after graduation, and I attribute FORCES and the Niagara Region's FORCES Program Specialist, Allie Tillman, for helping me along the way.

Not only am I grateful for the experience and practical lessons that FORCES taught me, but I am also grateful for the friends I met along the way. I was very fortunate to have been placed in a group with amazing people, many of which I'm still friends with and still work with. I'm glad I found FORCES, even if it was by chance! I was able to learn, help the environment, and end with a job I enjoy all while having fun along the way. I encourage future Stewards to give FORCES their all, because they never know what might come of it!

## FORCES Multi-Region Field Trips!

Emily Purce, NYS Parks Corps SCA AmeriCorps, FORCES Program Specialist, Central Region

After being separated from each other for so long, FORCES Staff and Stewards from the Finger Lakes, Niagara, and Central Regions made it a point to get together as many times as possible during the summer field season! Our slew of five field trips began at Clark Reservation State Park where Central and Finger Lakes teams met to perform a Fern Population Census of the largest population of American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) in New York State. Led by Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator, we were given IDing instructions, as well as tallying forms to fill out. Sections were already formed by Mike and Stephanie Minarik, AHTF Conservation Technician (and former Wells College FORCES Club President and FORCES Steward), within the population. Once we got to the population, each person was assigned one or two sections to scour in search of individual fern plants. AHTFs have a very specific habitat that can be treacherous for humans, so the census took a lot of time and effort in a steep gorge. In the end, we counted 1,388 individual plants, which is the second largest count since 1916. The last census had been a record high and was done in 2012 where 1,461 plants were counted. According to Mike, "this population is doing great and remains the largest hart's-tongue fern population in New York State."



Park Staff and FORCES Stewards at Green Lakes State Park for the owl survey. Photo: OPRHP



Park Staff, SCA members and FORCES Stewards at Robert H. Treman SP. Photo: OPRHP

Our next field trip took place in the Finger Lakes Region at Robert H. Treman State Park. Here, Finger Lakes, Central, Niagara, and even some Thousand Islands Staff and Stewards performed macroinvertebrate surveys led by the Central Region Biologist and the founder of FORCES, Tom Hughes. These surveys included kick-netting in Enfield Creek, then counting and IDing the macroinvertebrates in the nets, and filling out a worksheet that determined stream health. Enfield Creek was extremely high after a few weeks of rain, so our findings were not totally accurate but most of us got good water quality in the end. We were also given a gorge tour at Robert H. Treman, given by two Student Conservation Association (SCA) Environmental Educators, Clare Foley and Shelby Crawford. Clare is a former SUNY ESF FORCES Steward and club member!

The next week was a busy one for the FORCES crew. We started out at Green Lakes State Park where Finger Lakes, Niagara, and Central teams were able to meet again. At Green Lakes, James Boyd, Bird Conservation Area Project Coordinator, led a hiking tour where we saw both Green and Round Lake, the old growth forest, and the grassland. Some of the Finger Lakes Region Staff and Stewards camped out at Green Lakes, which gave the Central Region the perfect reason to plan our first ever owl survey that night. Around 9 o'clock, we headed out in a large group with headlamps to

the old growth forest led by Billy Sullivan, Invasive Species Tech and certified bird nerd. There, we stopped every few minutes to play owl calls through a speaker. The three calls played were the barred owl, the eastern screech owl, and the great horned owl. Within the first half mile of our hike, we came face to face with a beautiful barred owl, who sat and observed us for a few minutes while we did the same. While we didn't see any other owls throughout the survey, we did hear many eastern screeches and even a great horned call.

The next morning, Central and Finger Lakes Staff and Stewards headed over to Chittenango Falls State Park. There, Delaney Kalsman, Chittenango Ovate Amber Snail (COAS) Project Coordinator, gave us a tour of the gorge, the waterfall, the COAS habitat, and the trails of the park. Chittenango Falls State Park is a relatively small state park so after our tour, we pulled woody invasive species for about an hour, which ended up being a very productive hour because we had so many people.

Just a week later, Central and Finger Lakes Staff and Stewards met again at Sandy Island Beach State Park for our final summer field trip. There, Claire Nellis, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, gave us a tour of the north spit of the beach and told us the background on the project and the park. Of the two nests of Great Lakes piping plovers that hatched at Sandy Island Beach State Park this year, only two chicks remained on the day of our visit. We were able to find the chicks, observe them, perform behavioral surveys on them, and go for a swim in Lake Ontario!

It was such a blast being able to get together with FORCES Staff and Stewards from other regions this summer! We are hoping a few field trips become annual in the future, so project progress can be observed and so FORCES Stewards are able to explore regions of parks other than their own.



# The Force Behind FORCES Picture Page



Kennedy Sullivan holding a freshly banded male indigo bunting captured during MAPS banding.



Trainapalooza participants sit around a campfire during the two-day training at Watkins Glen State Park in early June.



Photograph of SUNY ESF lab reared snails to be released into the habitat zone at Chittenango Falls State Park.



Michael, SCA member and Haley Pond FORCES Steward banding a song sparrow.



COAS Steward Foster Valle tabling at Chittenango Falls State Park.



FORCES Stewards using spotting scopes to observe shorebirds at Sandy Island Beach State Park.

Photos: OPRHP



Kaitlynn Webber and Jillian Smith during their morning sampling at Woodlawn Beach State Park.



FORCES Stewards and Staff remove invasive species at Chittenango Falls State Park.



Niagara Stewards Julia Flowers, Maddie Was, & Brendan DeCoff waving from above while touring Robert H. Treman State Park.





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**FORCES Newsletter**  
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**The FORCES mission is to engage New York State college students to simultaneously improve OPRHP resources and enrich student academic, recreational, and career opportunities.**